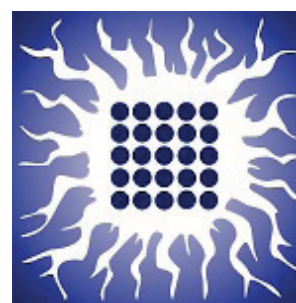


Biologia Serbica

Department of Biology and Ecology,
Faculty of Sciences, University of Novi Sad, Serbia



Book of Abstracts
Belgrade Bioinformatics Conference 2021
21-25 June 2021, Vinča, Serbia

Biologia Serbica

JUNE 2021

Vol. 43 - No. 1 Special Edition

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Milica Matavulj

University of Novi Sad, Faculty of Science, Department of Biology and Ecology,
Trg D. Obradovića 2, 21000 Novi Sad, Serbia, milica.matavulj@dbe.uns.ac.rs

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Biologia Serbica is formerly Review of Research, Faculty of Sciences, Biology Series (1971-2004), published by Department of Biology and Ecology, Faculty of Sciences, University of Novi Sad, Serbia

Aim and Scope

Biologia Serbica (BS) is an international scientific, peer-reviewed, open access journal that publishes original research articles, review articles, and short communications in all areas of biology.

Publisher

Department of Biology and Ecology



Faculty of Sciences

University of Novi Sad

Trg Dositeja Obradovića 2

21000 Novi Sad, Serbia

☎: +381 21 485 26 59

☎: +381 21 450 620

www.dbe.uns.ac.rs

Biologia Serbica is published biannually.

Printed by

"Sajnos"

Momčila Tapavice 2,

21000 Novi Sad

+381/21/499-461, +381/21/499-088

sajnosns@gmail.com

Date of publication: June 2018.

Subscription rates

Instructions available at

http://ojs.pmf.uns.ac.rs/index.php/dbe_serbica/index

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***In silico* study of some tetra- and penta-coordinated gold(III) complexes as potential inhibitors of SARS-CoV-2 main protease**

Marko Antonijević^{1*}, Ana Kesić¹, Dejan Milenković¹, Jelena Đorović Jovanović¹ and Zoran Marković¹

¹University of Kragujevac, Institute for Information Technologies, Jovana Cvijica bb, 34000 Kragujevac, Serbia

Abstract

During the last 20 years, much interest has been focused on some gold(III) complexes, due to their stability under physiological-like conditions. Gold(III) complexes have a significant effect on enzyme inhibition due to their strong sulfur binding affinity towards various sulfur-containing enzymes such as thioredoxin reductase, glutathione reductase, and cysteine protease. With the advent of SARS-CoV-2 viral infection, there has been a need to find inhibitors that will prevent the virus from acting. Recent research has shown that compounds that have certain functional groups in their structure are effective in inhibiting the main protease of this virus. In this paper, the inhibitor efficiency of the gold(III) complexes ($[\text{Au}(\text{DPP})\text{Cl}_2]^+$ (**C1**) and $[\text{Au}(\text{DMP})\text{Cl}_3]$ (**C2**), where DPP=4,7-diphenyl-1,10-phenanthroline and DMP=2,9-dimethyl-1,10-phenanthroline), as well as FDA approved drugs, cinanserin and chloroquine towards the main protease of SARS-CoV2 (M^{pro}) was estimated using the molecular docking simulations. The binding affinity of investigated compounds was examined by the AutoDock 4.2 software. The ligands were prepared for docking by optimization of their geometries by density functional theory (DFT) employing M06-2X functional in combination with the 6-311G(d,p) basis set for C, N, S, Cl, and H, and LAN2DZ basis set for Au. The native bound ligand (N3) was extracted from M^{pro} and binding pocket analysis was performed by the AutoGridFR program. Re-docking was performed with the investigated compounds to generate the same docking pose as found in the co-crystallized form of M^{pro} . Analysis by AGFR showed that the investigated compounds bind in the active site of M^{pro} . The obtained results indicate that the square-planar **C1** shows better inhibitory activity compared to cinanserin and chloroquine. The binding free energy of **C1** is significantly higher than that for FDA drugs, with values of -38.4, -31.8, and -31.2 kJ mol⁻¹, respectively. The obtained results revealed that **C1** and **C2** bind at the same binding pockets to M^{pro} as well as FDA drugs by weak non-covalent interactions. The most prominent interactions are hydrogen bonds, alkyl- π , and π - π interactions. The preliminary results suggest that gold(III) complexes showed good binding affinity against M^{pro} , as evident from the free binding energy (ΔG_{bind} in kJ/mol).

Keywords:

gold(III) complexes, DFT, molecular docking, SARS-CoV2

Acknowledgements:

Authors acknowledge the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia for the support through Contracts No. 451-03-09/2021-14/200378.

*Corresponding author, e-mail: mantonijevic@uni.kg.ac.rs

CIP – Каталогизација у публикацији

Библиотека Матице српске, Нови Сад 57

BIOLOGIA Serbica / editor-in chief Milica

Matavulj. –

Vol. 34, no. ½ (dec. 2012) – . – Novi Sad : Faculty of
Sciences, Department of Biology and Ecology,
2012. –

Illustr. ; 28 cm

Dva puta godišnje. – Je nastavak: Зборник
радова Природно-математичког факултета.

Серија за биологију = ISSN 0352 – 1788

ISSN 2334 – 6590 = Biologia Serbica

COBISS.SR – ID 275725831

ISSN 2334-6590



9 772334 659001



2021

Vol. 43 - No. 1 Special Edition

Biologia Serbica

ISSN 2334-6590



In silico study of some tetra- and penta-coordinated gold(III) complexes as potential inhibitors of SARS-CoV-2 main protease



Marko Antonijević, Ana Kesić*, Dejan Milenković, Jelena Đorović Jovanović and Zoran Marković
University of Kragujevac, Institute for Information Technologies, Jovana Cvijica bb, 34000
Kragujevac, Serbia

Introduction

Gold(III) complexes have a very strong effect on enzyme inhibition due to their strong sulfur binding affinity towards various sulfur-containing enzymes such as thioredoxin reductase, glutathione reductase, and cysteine protease. With the advent of SARS-CoV-2 viral infection, there has been a need to find inhibitors that will prevent the virus from acting. Recent research has shown that compounds that have certain functional groups in their structure are effective in inhibiting the main protease of this virus.

Methodology

In this paper, the inhibitor efficiency of the gold(III) complexes $[\text{Au}(\text{DPP})\text{Cl}_2]^+$ (C1) and $[\text{Au}(\text{DMP})\text{Cl}_3]$ (C2), where DPP=4,7-diphenyl-1,10-phenanthroline and DMP=2,9-dimethyl-1,10-phenanthroline), as well as FDA approved drugs, cinanserin and chloroquine towards the main protease of SARS-CoV2 (M^{pro}) was estimated using the molecular docking simulations. The binding affinity of investigated compounds was examined by the AutoDock 4.2 software. The ligands were prepared for docking by optimization of their geometries by density functional theory (DFT) employing M06-2X functional in combination with the 6-311++G(d,p) basis set for C, N, S, Cl, and H, and LAN2DZ basis set for Au.

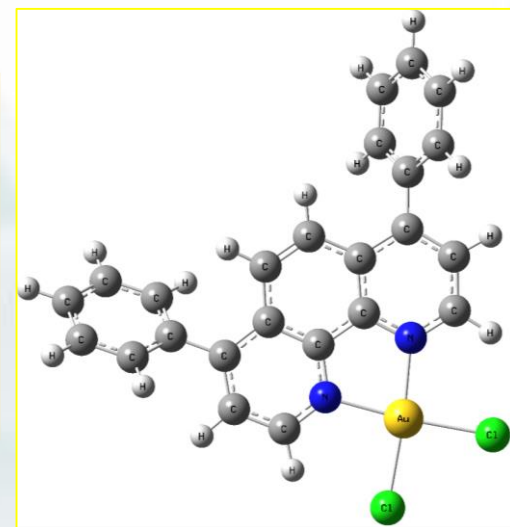
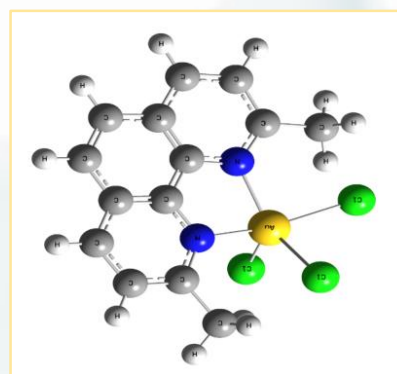


Figure. 1. The structure of studied gold(III) complexes C1 (left) and C2 (right)

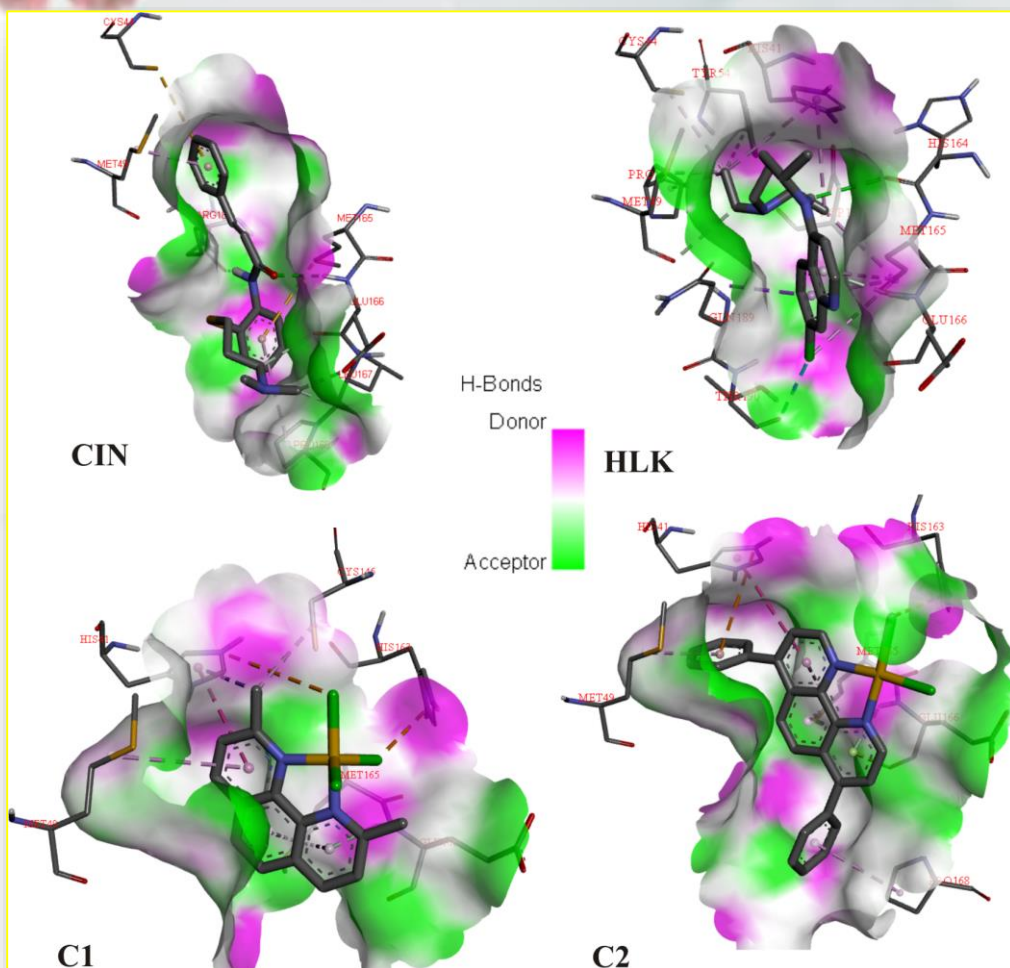


Figure. 2. 3D diagrams of noncovalent interactions between proteins and complexes

	ΔG_{bind} (kcal mol ⁻¹)	K_i (nM)
C1	-9.18	0.18
C2	-6.13	32.09
CIN	-7.60	2.70
HLK	-7.20	5.26

Table 1. Thermodynamic data obtained by docking simulation of tested compounds with SARS-CoV-2 M^{pro}

Results

Docking was performed with the investigated compounds to generate the same docking pose as found in the co-crystallized form of M^{pro} . Analysis by AGFR showed that the investigated compounds bind in the active site of M^{pro} . The obtained results indicate that the square-planar C1 shows better inhibitory activity compared to cinanserin and chloroquine. The binding free energy of C1 is significantly lower than that for FDA approved drugs, with values of -9.18, -7.60, and -7.20 kcal mol⁻¹, respectively.

Conclusion

- Complexes C1 and C2 bind at the same binding pockets to M^{pro} as well as FDA drugs by weak non-covalent interactions.
- The most prominent interactions are hydrogen bonds, alkyl- π , and π - π interactions.
- The preliminary results suggest that gold(III) complexes showed good binding affinity against M^{pro} , as evident from the free binding energy (ΔG_{bind} in kcal/mol).

Acknowledgments: Authors acknowledge the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia for the support through Contracts No. 451-03-68/2021-14/200378.